



How Do We Increase the Effectiveness of the Montgomery County Homeless Crisis Response System?

Background

Having a Homeless Crisis Response System that is able to quickly and effectively respond to the needs of individuals and families who experience a housing crisis is essential to our community's commitment to end chronic homelessness and reduce overall homelessness. We envision a community where homelessness is prevented whenever possible, and is rare, brief, and non-recurring for those who do experience homelessness.

The identification of specific strategies and actions to strengthen our system is critical to helping the community effectively respond to homelessness. Implementation of these actions using a Collective Impact Model – with a common agenda, consistent data measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support – is also essential to achieving system level improvements.

For more information on the Collective Impact Model, visit:

http://www.mcoho.org/departments/human_services_planning_and_development/fcfc_strategic_planning.php

System Targets

The Homeless Solutions Policy Board has established specific system targets related to the performance of our local Homeless Crisis Response System.

High Priority Targets for Emergency Shelter	FY 2016 System Performance (October 2015 – September 2016)
Average Length of Stay in Shelter: 30 days	Average length of Stay in Shelter: 39 days
Exit to Permanent Housing: 29%	Exit to Permanent Housing: 31%
Return to Homelessness within 6 months of exiting to a Permanent Destination: 20%	Return to Homelessness within 6 months of exiting to a Permanent Destination: 16%
High Priority Overall (CoC) System Target	FY 2016 System Performance (October 2015 – September 2016)
Annual number of homeless households: ≤ 3,000 Households	Annual number of homeless households: 3,509 Households

Community Survey

A survey was conducted with service providers, community members and persons with lived experience to identify key barriers to housing and the vital services needed to end and prevent homelessness. Key observations from the survey include the following:

- Among respondents with lived experience, **Rental Assistance** was identified as the **MOST important service**.
- Overall, **Housing Search Support** was identified as the MOST important service to quickly move people into permanent housing.
- **Lack of Regular Income** was identified as the MOST substantial barrier to finding housing.
- **Employment/Training/Education** was identified as the MOST critical service needed to prevent or divert people from entering the shelter system.
- **Case Management/Coordinated Services** was identified as the MOST critical service to shorten length of stay in shelter, increase exits from shelter to permanent housing, and reduce the number of people who experience additional episodes of homelessness and return to shelter.

Using this survey data, a set of potential options for achieving system targets, each with a set of action steps and tradeoffs, has been developed. Each option presents strategies with a different focus: Prevention, Shelter Services, Assistance after Shelter, and Employment.

Conclusion

There is no single right answer or independent action that will help the community meet its system targets. The online community forums will be used to gain community input from Homeless Solutions Policy Board members, homeless & housing providers, community members and persons who have experienced homelessness on a set of actions to improve the effectiveness of our local homeless crisis response system. **This Issue Guide is intended to stimulate the conversation.** Feedback from this process will inform the issuance of a Request for Collective Impact Proposals.

What is Common Ground for Action (CGA)?

Common Ground for Action (CGA) is simple but sophisticated platform for public deliberation online. CGA allows small groups to learn more about an issue, examine options for dealing with the issue, weigh tradeoffs, and find common ground, with beautiful visuals that let participants actually see their conversation evolve.

OPTION ONE	POTENTIAL ACTIONS TO CONSIDER	SOME TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER
<p>Emphasis on Prevention</p> <p>This option focuses on the utilization of community-based services in an effort to prevent individuals from becoming homeless for the first time or returning to shelter. This would require collaboration and coordination with multiple institutions and service providers.</p> <p>BUT...</p> <p>This could be very costly, especially if eligibility criteria is not specific about the clients who will receive these types of services. This notion also relies heavily on coordination between multiple parties and strong civic engagement within the community, which can be difficult to sustain.</p>	<p>A. Community-based Social Supports</p> <p>Using a peer model, utilize volunteers to provide community-based case management aimed at preventing individuals from entering the shelter system.</p>	<p>This would require a significant investment in building greater civic capacity in the community. Challenges also include adopting a consistent service delivery methodology.</p>
	<p>B. Coordinated Landlord Recruitment</p> <p>Implement a coordinated recruitment strategy to engage churches, civic organizations, and non-profit agencies to identify landlords who are willing to offer free/reduced rent and other supportive services.</p>	<p>This would require tremendous community support and coordination among multiple parties. A lead organization would need to facilitate the effort.</p>
	<p>C. Eviction Prevention Program</p> <p>Implement an eviction prevention program targeting HUD-subsidized housing residents.</p>	<p>This may reduce the number of vouchers available for others, due to fewer evictions and a lower turnover rate. It may require changes to be made to current public housing eviction practices and policies.</p>
	<p>D. Collaborate with Institutions on Discharge Planning</p> <p>Work collaboratively with institutions like jails, hospitals, nursing homes, foster care, and local housing code enforcement departments to prevent clients from being discharged into homelessness.</p>	<p>This will require additional resources for educating institutions and ensuring changes in practices. Institutions may also need an incentive to participate.</p>



OPTION TWO	POTENTIAL ACTIONS TO CONSIDER	SOME TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER
<p style="text-align: center;">Emphasis on Shelter Services</p> <p>This option originates from community feedback about how to shorten the length of stay in shelter and promote a timely exit to permanent housing. Survey responses emphasized that fast, intensive, and specialized services are needed in shelter—as opposed to services after households exit shelter.</p> <p>BUT...</p> <p>By emphasizing shelter services, clients may end up staying in shelter longer in an effort to connect to specialized services. This option also focuses very minimally on connecting clients to follow-up services.</p>	<p>E. Incentivize Client Behavior Devise an incentive-based service model for shelter residents to reinforce and/or discourage behaviors while in shelter. (i.e., clients receive “points” as a reward for attending appointments or securing housing—once they get a certain number of points they can cash them in for extra benefits, e.g. housing kit, additional toiletries, clothing items)</p>	<p>This may be complicated to administer given the quantity and diversity of people in shelter and result in unintended or negative consequences and competition. This may also lead to additional resources being utilized on clients who could potentially self-resolve.</p>
	<p>F. Dynamic Case Plans Implement dynamic case plans that clearly identify objectives and who is responsible. Case managers will share the agreed-upon case plan goals and projected timelines with clients, service team members, and shelter staff.</p>	<p>This will require a shared sense of accountability and a secure and consistent method for communication. This would also require service providers, across agencies and systems to have a shared vision.</p>
	<p>G. Specialized Services Teams Utilize collaborative teams of multi-agency case managers to provide specialized, client-focused services that address issues of employment, mental health, housing, and addiction in shelter.</p>	<p>There may be resistance from the agencies who would be dedicating specific resources to the shelters. It would require service providers, across agencies and systems, to have a shared vision.</p>
	<p>H. Earlier Triage & Linkage to Housing –Focused Services Administer triage assessment within 48 hours of shelter entry to quickly identify housing needs and immediate barriers. Clients determined to need Rapid Rehousing (RRH), a short-medium term rental assistance and services housing intervention, will meet with a case manager within 48 hours of the triage assessment. Clients needing other housing interventions will receive a comprehensive assessment within 5 to 7 days.</p>	<p>Assessments may become less accurate, due to clients being in an immediate crisis mode. The current assessment tool would need to be refined to increase its effectiveness. This would also require more staff capacity with flexible availability to administer assessment. This action may result in resources being utilized on clients who could potentially self-resolve.</p>
	<p>I. Enhance Case Management Create more positions for case managers who work with specialized populations (i.e., veterans, youth, families, etc.), and increase work hours to accommodate clients during early mornings, evenings, and weekends.</p>	<p>This would require funding to be shifted from direct client assistance to support additional case management staffing and training. This may also require a change in employee mindset, working relationships, and management structure.</p>

OPTION THREE	POTENTIAL ACTIONS TO CONSIDER	SOME TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER
<p>Emphasis on Assistance After Shelter</p> <p>In an effort to reduce the number of individuals who return to shelter, there needs to be an increase in services and assistance provided to clients after they exit. This option provides financial, employment, and mental health case management services after people are in housing.</p> <p>BUT...</p> <p>This option does not address the need for specialized services or intensive case management in shelter. Providing post-shelter assistance has the potential to be costly and clients may seek to enter the shelter system to get assistance even if they do not truly need it.</p>	<p>J. Voluntary After Care Services Offer clients the option to receive follow-up case management services, employment assistance, and mental health services after they are placed in housing.</p>	<p>Shelter services are limited to housing search and/or PSH case management. Immediate issues or barriers to housing stability may not be addressed. It may also be difficult to engage and/or locate clients who volunteered to receive these services once they are housed.</p>
	<p>K. Limit Shelter Stays Enact a 90-day limit on shelter stays within a 12-month time period. Clients will not be allowed to return to shelter within 12 months after they exit into permanent housing or another program.</p>	<p>A time limit would likely increase the number of people sleeping outdoors or in jails and hospitals. Clients qualifying for PSH would also need to be considered.</p>
	<p>L. Universal Housing Assistance Provide <u>all</u> clients who have been in shelter for 7 days or longer housing search support, rental assistance for 3 months, bus passes for employment, and necessary household supplies, if they are not assessed for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH).</p>	<p>This could be extremely costly and result in fewer people receiving financial assistance or the same number of people receiving less, unless significant new funding is identified or reallocated. Some clients may need rental assistance beyond 3 months to fully stabilize, while other clients may need less. This could potentially increase the length of time people are in shelter as they wait for housing search support and rental assistance.</p>



OPTION FOUR	POTENTIAL ACTIONS TO CONSIDER	SOME TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER
<p>Emphasis on Employment</p> <p>Some clients lack the soft and hard skills needed for stable employment. Employment and job training opportunities are needed to prevent individuals from entering the shelter system. To foster stable employment, clients need access to better jobs and support from their employers in an Employment First model.</p> <p>BUT...</p> <p>Often there are multiple barriers for people to overcome to in order to obtain and maintain employment. Employers will have to be more flexible and understanding of client needs.</p>	<p>M. Dedicated Employers Develop a pool of employers who commit to hire homeless/formerly homeless individuals and work with case managers to ensure that employees are retained. This may also include day labor or temporary work opportunities.</p>	<p>It may be difficult to change the misconceptions that employers have about the homeless population. This would require coordination with existing programs within the community to avoid the duplication of services.</p>
	<p>N. Assistance for Skills Program Participation Provide rental subsidies and transportation assistance for clients who are participating in a skills or apprenticeship program.</p>	<p>Some clients may want immediate access to earned income and not want to participate in an unpaid skills or apprenticeship program. Depending on the length of this program, it has the potential to be costly.</p>
	<p>O. Remove Barriers to Employment Implement an intentional advocacy effort to broaden job training eligibility requirements, increase job training opportunities, and reduce hiring/employment barriers (i.e., drug testing, criminal background checks, etc.).</p>	<p>Employers may be reluctant to partner with clients from this population, especially if they have had negative experiences in the past. Would require dedicated leadership and commitment of resources.</p>
	<p>P. Expand Paid Job Training Opportunities Expand paid job and soft skills training for clients to help them acquire and maintain employment.</p>	<p>Additional resources may be need to subsidize paid training opportunities. Connection to Workforce agencies and programs will also need to be strengthened.</p>

